

# NEWS IN brief

## Thai 'Red Shirt' leader jailed for defamation

AFP, Bangkok

A leader of Thailand's 'Red Shirt' movement was jailed yesterday for defaming an ex-prime minister, sidelining a key voice of dissent against the ruling junta. Thailand's Supreme Court sentenced Jatuporn Prompan over a 2009 speech accusing then-PM Abhisit Vejjajiva of being a "tyrant".

## Rebels kill 28 regime fighters in Syria

AFP, Beirut

At least 28 Syrian government soldiers and pro-regime fighters were killed Wednesday in a rebel ambush in the Eastern Ghouta region near Damascus, a monitor said yesterday. The fighters came under attack by the Army of Islam rebel group as they attempted to advance in the town of Al-Rihan, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



## McCain diagnosed with brain cancer

AFP, Washington

US Senator John McCain, a former prisoner of war and the maverick 2008 Republican presidential nominee, has been diagnosed with brain cancer, his office announced Wednesday. The 80-year-old lawmaker from Arizona underwent surgery to remove a blood clot from above his left eye last week and tests revealed that a primary brain tumor known was associated with the blood clot.



Palestinians shout slogans during a protest over Israel's new security measures at the compound housing al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday. The Israeli army said an assailant tried to stab Israeli soldiers south of Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank yesterday and was shot dead.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Global terror attacks down in 2016: US

AFP, Washington

The US State Department said Wednesday that global terror incidents and deaths fell last year, while it maintained its designation of Iran as the top "state sponsor of terrorism."

In its annual country-by-country assessment of terrorism worldwide, the department pinpointed Islamic jihadist groups Islamic State Al-Qaeda and the Taliban as the leading culprits for terror attacks.

But it said overall attacks had fallen nine percent last year from 2015, and deaths were down 13 percent.

More than half of the attacks took place in Iraq, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and the Philippines, said the department's acting coordinator for counterterrorism, Justin Sibrel.

Attacks and deaths were up notably in Iraq, Somalia and Turkey.

The report said a common thread for many of the terror attacks last year "was adherence to violent extremist ideology put forth by a fundamentalist strain of Sunni Islam that perceives itself to be under attack by the West and in conflict with other branches of Islam."

At the same time, predominantly Shia Iran was again officially dubbed the leading state sponsor of terrorism. The report cited its longstanding support for the powerful Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah, a US-designated terror organization.

The report cited Hezbollah's support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad with troops and supplies as well as its attacks on Israeli soldiers along the Lebanon-Israel border.

In addition, the report said Iran "remained unwilling" to put on trial senior Qaeda members whom it has detained.

## India has int'l backing Says Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, praises Bhutan for standing up to China in the row

AFP, New Delhi

India's stand in its border dispute with China is supported by other countries, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj said yesterday as she praised tiny Bhutan for standing up to China in the row.

Swaraj reaffirmed that India's security could be jeopardised if China takes over the zone where the frontiers of India, China and Bhutan meet.

The standoff started more than a month ago after Chinese troops started building a road on the remote plateau, which is disputed by China and Bhutan.

Indian troops moved in to the flashpoint zone to halt the work.

"All the countries are understanding that India's stand is not wrong. Justice is on our side, this is being accepted by all other countries," the minister told the upper house of the Indian parliament.

China has also declared that it has international support, with its foreign ministry saying on Tuesday that foreign diplomats were "shocked" by India's "illegal trespass".

Swaraj praised Bhutan, one of the world's

smallest countries, for taking an "aggressive" stand and not bowing to its giant neighbour.

Bhutan has said construction of the road is "a direct violation" of agreements with China. Bhutan and China do not have diplomatic relations.

India, which fought a war with China in 1962 over a separate part of the disputed Himalayan border, supports Bhutan's claim.

"There is a written agreement signed in 2012 which states that the issue of trijunction (the border where the three countries meet) should be decided by India, China and ... Bhutan," Swaraj said.

"All this while China has been building roads... various activities have been going on. This time they brought bulldozers and excavators and their intention is to reach the trijunction.

"They want to end the status quo of this trijunction unilaterally," she added.

China has said Indian troops should "unconditionally" withdraw to the Indian side before talks can start on the dispute.

### SIKKIM STANDOFF



## Maduro, foes head into crucial showdown

REUTERS, Caracas

Many Venezuelan streets were deserted and barricaded yesterday for a strike called by foes of President Nicolas Maduro to demand a presidential election and the abandonment of a plan for a new congress they fear would institute a dictatorship.

Many businesses were staying shut as the opposition organized a 24-hour national shutdown from 6 am in a civil disobedience campaign they are dubbing "zero hour" to try to end nearly two decades of Socialist Party rule.

"There's no movement. Everything is closed. We must all do our best to get rid of this tyrant," said Miguel Lopez, 17, holding a homemade shield emblazoned with "No To Dictatorship!" as he manned a roadblock on a Caracas street devoid of traffic.

Many private transport groups heeded the strike call, while students, neighbors and activists

hauled rubbish and furniture into streets to form barriers. Many families were keeping children behind doors in case of trouble.

Four months of anti-government unrest have killed about 100 people, injured thousands and left hundreds in jail.

Leaders of Venezuela's 2.8 million public employees said state businesses and ministries would remain open, and there was a trickle of workers on the street.

"I'm on strike 'in my heart' because if we don't turn up, they will fire us," said a 51-year-old engineer at state steel plant Sidor in southern Bolivar state.

No disruptions were expected at oil company PDVSA which brings in 95 percent of Venezuela's export revenue. Some people grumbled that the opposition action would cost them money and prevent them seeking food at a time of extreme economic crisis in the OPEC nation.



This handout photo taken and released yesterday by the Philippine Army shows Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (L) and military chief Eduardo Ano (R) examining seized weaponry from Islamist militants during a visit to a military camp in Marawi on the southern island of Mindanao.

PHOTO: AFP

## PANAMA PAPERS CASE Sharif's kin could face 7-year jail: Pak SC

PRI, Islamabad

The children of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif could face up to seven years in jail if it was proved that they had submitted fake documents to the Panama panel probing the money laundering allegations against the family, the Supreme Court warned yesterday.

The apex court heard the Panamagate scandal case for the fourth consecutive day since the hearing began on Monday, following submission of a report by the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) on July 10, which was tasked by the court to probe allegation of corruption against Sharif and his family.

"The punishment for submitting forged documents in the court is seven years in jail," warned the three-member panel of judges.

The JIT among other things has observed that some of the documents submitted by the children of Sharif, 67, were tampered with.

A trust deed provided by the prime minister's daughter Maryam Nawaz and executed in 2006 was written in Calibri font which was not commercially available till 2007. It was also notarised from an office in London on Saturday which is officially an off day, raising concern about the authenticity of the document.

Similarly, Government of Dubai has revealed that the documents of Gulf Steel Mills provided by the prime minister's son Hussain Nawaz were forged as there was no record of those documents.

## Myanmar sees insurgents behind Rohingya killings

REUTERS, Maung Hna Ma

In the middle of the night on July 4, more than a dozen masked men, dressed head-to-toe in black, surrounded Abdu Sulwon's home in northwestern Myanmar. His widow says that was the last time she saw him alive.

"I saw a trail of blood where they dragged him away," said Haleda, 40, showing bruises on her body where she says the men beat her with sticks. Her husband's body was found in a ravine near their village, Maung Hna Ma, on Saturday.

She gave her account to reporters during a government-organised trip to the troubled north of Myanmar's Rakhine State, where most people belong to the stateless Rohingya Muslim minority.

Officials say Rohingya insurgents are behind this and a slew of killings in the area that has been racked by violence in recent months, with security forces accused of committing atrocities against civilians.



Sulwon, relatives of the victims broadly supported the official version events.

If militants were to blame for at least some of the killings, it would add to evidence the insurgency that flared in October has not been fully rooted out, despite the government announcing the end of its security operation in February.

## Brazil freezes assets of ex-president

AFP, Brasilia

A Brazilian judge leading an anti-corruption probe has ordered assets belonging to former president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva frozen after last week convicting and sentencing him to prison for graft.

Lula, as he is widely known, remains free pending an appeal of the verdict. He denies any wrongdoing and says he will attempt a political comeback next year by running for president.

Ordering the asset freeze, Judge Sergio Moro said, was in response to the charge that Lula accepted a bribe of a luxury beachside apartment and \$1.1 million in cash from one of Brazil's biggest construction companies, Odebrecht SA.

Moro put the value of Lula's assets in property and bank accounts as \$4.3 million, according to court papers released Wednesday.

They comprised three apartments, a plot of land, two vehicles and two accounts holding more than the equivalent of \$190,000.

Lula's lawyers described the move as "illegal," claiming that it impaired the livelihood of the former president and his family, adding they would challenge the decision. His party said the sanctions amounted to "economic suffocation."

Lula was a week ago given a nine-and-a-half-year sentence after his conviction.

The 71-year-old has portrayed the judicial blow as an attempt to keep him out of the running for the presidency.

# Ram Nath Kovind A little known Indian president

AGENCIES

Ram Nath Kovind has won the presidential poll this year. With a massive support from various allies and other parties across the country, NDA candidate and former Bihar governor Ram Nath Kovind was way ahead of former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, fielded by the Congress party-led Opposition camp.

Incumbent Pranab Mukherjee's last day as president will be on July 24 and Kovind's oath-taking as India's 14th president will be on the day after.

Kovind was born on October 1, 1945 at Kanpur Dehat, Uttar Pradesh. He was married to Savita Kovind on 30th May, 1974. Kovind has a son, Prashant Kumar, who is married, and a daughter Swati.

Kovind, a B.Com, LLB from Kanpur University (Uttar Pradesh) has been a very successful lawyer. He was Central Government Advocate in Delhi High Court from 1977 to 1979 and Central Government Standing Counsel in Supreme Court from 1980 to 1993, according to his profile on the Bihar governor's website. Kovind became Advocate-on-Record of the Supreme Court of India in 1978. He had practised in Delhi High Court and Supreme Court for about 16 years until 1993.

Kovind was elected to Rajya Sabha in April 1994 from Uttar Pradesh and served for two consecutive terms for 12 years until March 2006. In Parliament, Kovind served as member of several important Parliamentary Committees such as: Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes/Tribes, Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs, Parliamentary Committee on Petroleum and Natural Gas, Parliamentary Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment, Parliamentary Committee on Law and Justice, Chairman of Rajya Sabha House Committee. Kovind has served as Member of Board of Management of

KOVIND WAS BORN ON OCTOBER 1, 1945 AT KANPUR DEHAT, UTTAR PRADESH. HE WAS MARRIED TO SAVITA KOVIND ON 30TH MAY, 1974. KOVIND HAS A SON, PRASHANT KUMAR, WHO IS MARRIED, AND A DAUGHTER SWATI.



Bhartiya Janta Party President Amit Shah (R) greets India's President elect Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Dr. B.R Ambedkar University, Lucknow and also as a Member of Board of Governors of Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata. Kovind also represented India in the United Nations and addressed United Nations General Assembly in October 2002. As a member of Parliament, Kovind visited Thailand, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Germany, Switzerland, France, United Kingdom and USA on Study Tour. The NDA candidate has been known as a crusader for the Rights and Cause of Weaker Sections of the Society specially Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/OBC/Minority/Land Women from his student days. Kovind had joined the movement of SC/ST employees against the Central Government when in 1997 some orders were issued by the Centre which adversely affected the interests of employees of the Scheduled Castes/Tribes.

## Linkin Park singer found dead at home

AFP, New York

Linkin Park singer Chester Bennington, who overcame a troubled childhood to top the charts with an angry but melodic brand of metal, was found dead yesterday in an apparent suicide.

He was 41.

"Shocked and heartbroken, but it's true," Linkin Park's guitarist and main songwriter Mike Shinoda wrote on Twitter.

The Los Angeles County coroner's office said it received a call just after 9:00am that Bennington had been found hanging at his home in the luxurious Palos Verdes Estate area.

"It is being handled as a possible suicide," said Brian Elias, chief of operations at the county coroner's office.

Bennington had opened up in recent years about his troubled childhood in Arizona. He said he suffered years of sexual abuse from a family friend and turned to alcohol and hard drugs after his parents divorced when he was 11.

He turned his rage into music with a growling voice that owed much to heavy metal. But Linkin Park became one of the leading forces in the wave of so-called nu metal which incorporated pop structures and hip-hop, with Shinoda often rapping in between Bennington's vocals.

Bennington had spoken of being moved by the death in May of his friend Chris Cornell, the singer of leading grunge band Soundgarden.

But there had been little public sign of Bennington retreating from the world.

Linkin Park was scheduled to start a tour next week which would include a performance at New York's Citi Field baseball stadium with other major acts from the band's generation including Blink-182 and the Wu-Tang Clan.